



Pathology Biology Section – 2006

G50 Professional Quality in a Forensic Medical Setting: The Singapore Experience

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After attending this presentation, attendees will 1. Understand the need for Professional Quality in a forensic medical setting; 2. Gain an insight in how CFM, HSA has approached the subject of Professional Quality; and 3. See the need to implement quality systems suitable to their own operating environment.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by encouraging implementation of quality systems and promoting more emphasis on assuring quality of services of the forensic medicine community; and encouraging dialogue between practitioners as to best practices that would engender the above.

In many different industries, including the healthcare sector, the pursuit of quality has become an essential element in both assuring consumers a consistency of standards in the products and services delivered as well as delivering a competitive marketing advantage. Indeed, this also applies to many public agencies around the world.

Forensic medical practices/consultancies are typically small “enterprises” with limited budgets and they operate within a limited legal/geographical jurisdiction, in a typical single seller (the forensic practice) and single buyer/payer (State/Law Enforcement agency) environment. Some of these “enterprises” are one-man-operations (OMO).

Professional accountability is mostly limited to challenge within a courtroom environment or is non-existent outside of the courtroom in some instances. Peer review is not a norm. The weight placed on personal professional independence, expertise and experience creates an milieu amenable to development of a prima donna culture where forensic opinion is no longer largely a question of science but of the weight of persona and charisma in court and the public eye, where the risk of errant practices and practitioners may remain undetected for a long time. Failure to deliver good quality results can pervert the course of natural justice and damage public confidence in the law enforcement and judicial systems.

Considering the impact of the professional work in influencing judicial outcomes, it is important, in the authors’ view that while one cannot wholesale adopt practices from the industry, efforts nonetheless need to be made to identify relevant and appropriate measures for adoption, to assure the stakeholders (the Prosecution, the Courts, Law Enforcement, the Public, the Politicians, the funders) that high standards in professional forensic practice are delivered consistently with accountability. The paper will discuss the experience of the Centre for Forensic Medicine, Health Sciences Authority Singapore, in its journey towards assuring professional quality.

Quality, Forensic Medicine, Accreditation